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Abstract: In response to the continuing deterioration of the Sino-Soviet relationship, Soviet and Chinese officials, journalists, and scholars together embarked on the production of a Soviet journal, its translation into Chinese, and its distribution in China. Friendship Society and foreign affairs officials sponsored a series of “Readers’ Conferences” in numerous cities in China, designed to solicit Chinese ideas about the improvement of the journal and the broader relationship. The effort failed, and the contrasting concerns and assumptions brought by the two sides to the conferences and to the editorial discussions of the journal illustrate the complexities and difficulties of the Sino-Soviet relationship at the lower-levels of collaboration and exchange.

Keywords: Sino-Soviet relations, Chinese foreign policy, Soviet foreign policy, socialism, Friendship Society

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中苏关系中文化合作的困境：
《苏中友好》的失败，1958-1960

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摘要：作为对持续恶化的中苏关系的回应，苏中官方、新闻工作者以及学者联手创办了一种苏联杂志，该杂志有中文译本，并在中国发行。在中国的许多城市里，友好协会及外交部官员们举办了一系列的“读者研讨会”，谋求借中国式智慧来改善这份杂志，以及发展更为广泛的关系。这种努力以失败告终，双方在读者研讨会上及对编辑杂志的一些讨论过程中显露出彼此不同的顾虑和设想，进而展现出中苏关系中较低级别之间的文化合作与交流所具有的复杂性与困难性。

关键词：中苏关系、中国的对外政策、苏联的对外政策、社会主义、友谊社会
Sino-Soviet tension in the late 1950s was most visible at the higher levels of exchange, evident in 1958 in the form of disputes over defense cooperation, the Soviet proposal to establish a joint submarine flotilla, and the Soviet interest in the construction of long-wave receiving stations along the Chinese coast. The deterioration of the relationship was expressed in moments of frustration and miscommunication between Chairman Mao and First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev, such as when Mao refused to inform the Soviet general secretary of China’s impending plans to provoke the Taiwanese and their American supporters during Khrushchev’s visit in Beijing from July 31 to August 3, 1958. Such friction dismayed numerous participants in the “Great Friendship,” who were by this time highly invested in the ongoing forms of collaboration between institutions, ministries, factories, educational institutions, and so on.

Those at the lower levels of the exchange believed that more effective exchange and collaboration could deter the progressive deterioration of the relationship. The All-Union Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (Vsesoiuznoe obshchestvo kul’turnoi sviazi s zagranitsei, or VOKS) had been a longtime contributor to Sino-Soviet cultural exchange, with established branches in China since the 1920s.

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4 On VOKS generally, see Michael-David Fox, Showcasing the Great Experiment: The Dilemmas of Cultural Collaboration in Sino-Soviet Relations: The Failure of Suzhong youhao, 1958-1960
the more ambitious Friendship Societies, which were formed throughout the entire socialist bloc, and in China were most common and active in the Northeast after 1945.\textsuperscript{5} They promoted good will toward the Soviet Union, the study of the Russian language, the education of the population about the virtues of Soviet culture and the Soviet experience, and organized exhibits, lectures, classes, and trips between the Soviet Union and China.

By the middle of the 1950s, the Chinese had become more confident in their relationship with the USSR, and also eager to alter the format of exchange characteristic of institutions like the Friendship Society. If the relationship was truly “mutual,” some Chinese began to wonder, why did the Soviet Union not have a Soviet-Chinese Friendship Society for the dissemination of information about the achievements of China and Chinese culture? Why weren’t more Soviets learning Chinese, just as many Chinese were learning Russian?\textsuperscript{6} Why weren’t there more Chinese publications in the Soviet Union to complement the many Russian publications in China?\textsuperscript{7} On his trip to China in the fall of 1956, Soviet writer Boris Polevoi with embarrassment fielded numerous questions from Chinese colleagues about the absence of a companion society in the Soviet Union. “Our responses,” he conceded, “did not sound particularly convincing. The answer that we do not have such a society creates [the impression] of an unjust inequality in the mutual popularization of achievements, and it seems to us that this has already

\begin{thebibliography}{10}
\bibitem{30June1939} 30 June 1939, Wang Xiaolai to Shao Lizi and Chen Lifu, Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv rossiiskoi federatsii (State Archive of the Russian Federation, Moscow [GARF]) f. 5283, op. 18, d. 23, l. 97; 3 December 1949, F. Gordienko to Kuz’menko, GARF f. 5283, op. 17, d. 459, l. 3-8.
\bibitem{NAPankov} N.A. Pankov, “Obshchestvo sovetskovo-kitaiskoi druzhby,” Problemy dal’nego vostoka, no. 3 (1972), 207-08.
\end{thebibliography}
come to the attention of the Chinese public.” Polevoi also advocated for the
more efficient translation into Chinese of a greater quantity of Soviet books,
literature, and material from the press. Actually, this question of reciprocity
in cultural and other relations had become common throughout the bloc in the
wake of Stalin’s death and the general transformation of the tenor of intra-bloc
relations. In 1957, the Obshchestvo sovetsko-kitaiskoi druzhby (OSKD, the
Society of Soviet-Chinese Friendship), known simply as the Friendship
Society, was founded in the Soviet Union.

By this time, the Chinese routinely pointed out the general absence of
Soviet recognition of their contribution to the relationship, the bloc, and the
general cause of international socialism. This was a potentially explosive topic,
of course, given Chinese frustration about the long “century of humiliation”
that had made the Chinese understandably sensitive to cultural slights from
foreigners. Chinese needs were vast in the immediate wake of the
revolution, and they routinely told the Soviets this and publicly thanked them
for their aid. The Soviet Union was obviously the center of the revolution,
the “elder brother” (a Chinese formulation) in the relationship, and far more
experienced and advanced in industrial development and the general business
of economic and technical reconstruction in the wake of warfare. Eventually,
however, the Chinese began to feel slighted by the Soviet advisers and their
assumptions, and even the grand Soviet proclamations about the nature of the
relationship. They started demanding more recognition of the “mutually
beneficial” character of the friendship. While remaining grateful for Soviet aid
and support, the Chinese began to emphasize the significance of their own
contributions to the health and functioning of the Soviet Union and the broader

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8 26 November 1956, B. Polevoi, Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiw noveishii istorii
(Russian State Archive of Contemporary History, Moscow [RGANI]) f. 5, op. 28, r.
5200, d. 506, l. 89.
9 3 September 1955, “O nekotorykh nedostatkakh v organizatsii kul’turnyh i nauchnykh
sviazei mezhdu SSSR i stranam narodnoi demokratii,” S. Rumiantsev, RGANI f. 5, op.
28, r. 5136, d. 286, l. 188.
10 Jonathan D. Spence, The Gate of Heavenly Peace: The Chinese and Their Revolution,
Revolution in Twentieth-Century China,” in Timothy Creek, ed., A Critical Introduction
to Mao (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 31-60; David Scott, China
11 10 August 1949, Liu Shaoqi to Stalin, “Gei sidalin de zhe xiexin,” Jianguo yilai Liu
bloc. In both private and public exchanges, the Chinese presented their country as a source of valuable resources, foodstuffs, textiles, industrial production, cultural achievement, and so on, now all fortunately in the service of international socialism.

The greatest challenge for longtime participants in the exchange came in 1958 with the emergence of Mao’s Great Leap Forward, the radical program of transformation that included the people’s communes, the steel campaign, communal kitchens, and a series of challenges to the advisers, socialist bloc economic practices, and the general system of bloc planning. Ministries of foreign affairs reports from several bloc countries detail the growing concerns of diplomats about the direction and consequences of the policies of the Great Leap Forward. The East Germans, Czechoslovaks, Hungarians and others felt that the Chinese suspicion of expertise, training, and traditional forms of achievement were potentially dangerous attacks on them and the alliance.12 Chairman Mao and his supporters became sensitive to bloc criticism of the new developments in China, revealed most dramatically in the events surrounding the Lushan plenums in the summer of 1959.13 Mao’s most significant critic, Minister of Defense Peng Dehuai, had just returned from a 50-day trip with military officials to the Soviet Union and several East European countries, signaling that reservations about the Great Leap Forward from within the country were now dangerously intersecting with bloc criticisms.14 However, long-time participants in the relationship optimistically assumed “internationalist” solidarity and continued to believe that the shared construction of socialism could weather any relatively insignificant differences


or even cultural misunderstandings that might temporarily cloud the relationship.

**The Failure of Suzhong youhao**

One of the most interesting Soviet responses to the accelerating cultural misunderstandings of the late 1950s was the collaborative production of the journal (Suzhong youhao). The journal was a collection of translated material from the Soviet press designed for distribution in China. The Soviets also distributed the journal among Chinese students and enterprise exchange participants in the Soviet Union.

So they intended this publication to serve as a forum for Sino-Soviet discussion and exchange, to educate the Chinese about the nature of Soviet aid and broader developments within the bloc, and to address the Chinese concerns about equality. Like the alliance generally, however, the journal was subject to radically different assumptions and perceptions from the two sides. Soviet sinologists and administrators believed their task was to counter what they took to be mistaken Chinese notions about socialism and even the dangerous misconceptions of an uneducated people in need of tutelage. Conversely, the Chinese brought very different concerns to the editorial discussions of the journal.

The familiar institutions engaged with the production of Soviet culture and the handling of the Sino-Soviet exchange, such as VOKS, the Foreign Literature Publishing House, the liaison offices of numerous ministries associated with culture and education, and Sovinformbiuro, collaborated in the editing and production of the journal. To complement the work of the 35 Soviet contributors, the journal also engaged 14 Chinese nationals as literary editors, advisors, translators, and production workers, including Li Zhuang and Ding Haode from Renmin ribao and Fang Xian from Xinhua (the Chinese press agency). The Chinese also took responsibility for the crucial issues of translation, local production, and distribution. By April 1960 the staff of the journal had grown to 70 people, consisting of 57 Soviets and 13 Chinese. Fourteen of the 57 Russians could speak or read Chinese. Soviet officials often

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15 10 December 1957, P. Kriukov, V. Rogov, K. Iabukhtin, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 1, l. 2.
16 15 October 1957, N.P. Zakharov and Lin Lang, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 2, l. 1; 10 January 1958, “Doklad,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 5, l. 2-6.
proclaimed their customary enthusiasm for the potential of the relationship, and those with a scholarly and literary bent even imagined the journal as a significant intellectual contribution and form of engagement with the Chinese intelligentsia, in the tradition of Vissarion Belinskii and other social critics of the nineteenth-century.

The Chinese, however, had numerous concerns for the editorial board. The experienced Russian hands in China such as scholar and diplomat S.L. Tikhvin'skii tried to address them. Li Zhuang, the adviser from Renmin ribao, engaged Tikhvin'skii in a series of discussions designed to communicate the Chinese concerns to the Russians. Many of the Chinese issues were practical problems that were very familiar to workers in the world of socialist bloc propaganda. For instance, Li Zhuang felt that the journal needed more color photographs, clearer captions to images, catchier titles, and more material that addressed matters beyond the Soviet Union itself. More worrisome, however, especially to Soviet China watchers who were by 1958 long concerned about the state of Sino-Soviet relations, was Li Zhuang’s view that the journal was simply not connecting with the interests and concerns of the Chinese reader. Li Zhuang was frustrated with articles and titles that “say nothing to the Chinese reader,” or those that failed to be “concrete” and “lively.” Even thought-provoking articles often “do not correspond to issues of life in China.” Renmin Ribao, he explained, was much better in this way. Tikhvin'skii understood what Li Zhuang was saying, and went one step further by suggesting to his Soviet colleagues that the more serious matter was just the overall transferability of the USSR’s experience. How do we identify and convey, he wondered, the “specific topics that will help systematically express the experience of socialist construction in the USSR?” Our Chinese colleagues, he continued, expect and await useful help in the resolution of “pressing tasks in the construction of socialism in China.”

This chorus of Chinese complaints came to the attention of Soviet ambassador Pavel Iudin, who then encouraged M.V. Zimianin of the Far East

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18 4 May 1958, “Zapis’ besedy,” S.L. Tikhvin'skii and Li Zhuang, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 9, l. 7.
Section of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, A.A. Andreev from the Friendship Society, and G.A. Zhukov from VOKS to devote their energy to the matter of improving the quality and effectiveness of the journal. These were important officials within the Soviet diplomatic establishment, from institutions central to the Sino-Soviet relationship. The quality of Soviet work was always a concern for Russians in China, as they knew the Chinese were watching carefully. “Poor articles will only embarrass us before our Chinese friends,” explained Friendship Society Chair Andreev. Fashioning himself a significant theoretician, Iudin characteristically suggested more “solid, theoretical, summarizing, articles and essays with a specific problematique.” The editorial board of the journal, headed by V.N. Rogov and joined by N.M. Potanov, P.S. Kapitsa, Tikhvinskii, B.G. Kokashvili, Iu.I. Balanenko, and I.S. Shcherbakov, sponsored a series of “Readers’ Conferences,” or discussions, from 1958-1960 that drew on the expertise of these institutions, with substantial Chinese contributions as well. The Friendship Society played host to these Readers’ Conferences in numerous Chinese cities, among them Beijing, Shanghai, Tianjin, Wuhan, Chengdu and smaller provincial cities. These events were not open to the public, but the invited participants included a wide variety of figures associated with numerous Chinese and Soviet institutions, publishing houses, and enterprises. Rogov and his editorial board began to read the unsolicited letters to the journal from the Chinese public, and pushed for effective and regular Readers’ Conferences in order to respond to the concerns of the Chinese and improve the deteriorating relationship.

In response to the overwhelming Chinese criticism, the Soviets quietly dropped their initial pretensions about Belinskii and the traditions of the intelligentsia from the nineteenth-century. We cannot direct our message, offered Comrade Zakharov, at “one category of people,” by which he meant the educated; instead Chinese peasants, workers and their specific concerns needed to be expressed in the journal if it were to be successful. In a similar vein, a Comrade Popenko at a October 1958 discussion noted that connecting

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20 13 March 1958, P. Iudin to M.V. Zimianin, A.A. Andreev, G.A. Zhukov, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 9, l. 18.
21 12 December 1958, “Priem,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 9, l. 16.
22 4 April 1958, “Tezisy doklada,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 8, l. 10.
with the Chinese reader meant addressing the concerns of peasants and the “simple Chinese man.” Comrade Khomenko suggested a section called “On the Street,” which would provide information about “any street in any city, and show who lives on this street, how they live, and the theaters, clubs, stores, and schools there.” Comrade Popenko managed to insult his imagined reader even as he attempted to recognize his needs. The concession to the interests of the reader, offered Popenko, was a particular challenge because the “simple Chinese reader is insufficiently educated compared to our average reader.” Numerous Chinese letter-writers to the journal made clear their concerns, forcing the scholars, advisers, and officials to question the very notion of “friendship” between the Soviets and the Chinese. How might they address the everyday needs and “small details” of relationships between individuals? Soviets such as Popenko and his colleagues had to face the fact that they had failed to produce material that spoke to the “situation in China.”

However, the worried Russian contributors to this discussion could only visualize a traditional resolution to the problem of improving the relationship. This was especially the case in the Soviet Union. At a meeting sponsored by the Friendship Society in Moscow in July 1958, with only one Chinese voice present, Russians from a wide variety of institutions proclaimed their affection for Chinese culture, tradition and architecture. Officials more distant from recent developments and tensions in the Sino-Soviet relationship especially tended to return to traditional Russian notions about the purpose and potential of the Russian mission in Asia. Comrade Cherniak from Gosstroi and Comrade Gubareva from the Ministry of Culture both suggested more attention to stories about Chinese traditional literature and architecture, and the history of Chinese opposition to western imperialism. Kaigorodov from the Library of Foreign Literature wanted to read more about “national traditions, customs, mores, and so on.” Others proclaimed their respect for ancient Chinese history. At a June 1958 discussion in Irkutsk, P.P. Khoroshikh from Irkutsk State University explained that many works of Chinese architecture “were created close to five thousand years ago” and “attest to the creative value of the Chinese people.”
This Russian preoccupation with antiquity was common in the borderland regions of both the imperial Russian and Soviet worlds, and numerous Soviets oblivious to concerns and trends in China continued to visualize the proper cultivation of the national past as one of the virtues brought by the umbrella of the socialist bloc alliance.

In the Suzhong youhao discussions, the Soviets remained oblivious to the Maoist preoccupation with the importance of peasant culture and the problem of the accessibility and significance of high culture. Comrade Severin of the Ministry of Culture suggested more attention to the writings, birthdays, and biographies of famous Russian writers, composers, and theater directors, as well as more material on violin and piano competitions in which Soviet musicians excelled. “In China the piano schools have not attained the accomplishments of our own,” he proclaimed. Severin continued to frustrate the Chinese by suggesting the journal focus more on the example of the Uzbek adoption and use of aspects of Russian and European high culture. We often criticize the talent of the Central Asians, he offered, while instead we should proudly celebrate the appearance of such work in Central Asia and the East.28 China too was to his mind a related example. This perpetual reference to the extension of culture to the Soviet Asian frontier insulted the Chinese, who after all belonged to a nation proud of its own civilizing mission toward its frontier peoples.

The Chinese press heralded the appearance and potential of Suzhong youhao in China, but in a characteristic manner that reflected and served Chinese visions of future development and the alliance. Mostly the discussions about the journal illustrated the inability of the two sides to communicate. While contributors to Jiefang ribao, Renmin ribao, Guangming ribao, and numerous other publications drew on the typical notions about proletarian internationalism, socialist solidarity, the Friendship, and the Soviet Union as “China’s tomorrow,” they did it in such a way as to recast the Soviet experience in terms of visualizing future goals in Chinese terms.29 Chinese letter-writers to the journal and contributors to the numerous Readers’


Conferences throughout China similarly visualized Chinese experiences in the Soviet Union. At a Readers’ Conference in Tianjin in July 1959, Chinese contributors professed excitement about the “high speed” and “grandiose extent” of industrial accomplishments in the USSR. It sounded as if the supposed struggles and victories of the GLF were unfolding in the Soviet Union. Li Yi similarly imagined Soviet production growth in steel as a Soviet version of a “great leap.” In Shanghai in March 1958 Chinese attendees at the Readers’ Conference also referred to the great upsurge in productivity currently taking place in the Soviet Union. Chairman Mao and other theoreticians were long proud of their effort to “sinicize” Marxism-Leninism, but this was another order of magnitude.

By visualizing the Soviet Union in Chinese terms, the Chinese could thus convince themselves that the Great Leap Forward and the increasingly radical Maoist themes in Chinese culture and politics did not necessarily represent a challenge to the Soviet model. The Soviets and the Chinese were together making rapid strides forward. “The Chinese people under the leadership of the Communist Party,” stated Weng Yunsheng of the Dagongbao Publishing House, “utilizing the achievements of Soviet science and technology, will be able even faster to make a leap in its development.” Long Yunqing, a rural schoolteacher from Sichuan Province, wanted to learn about the role of “physical and intellectual labor” in overcoming the divide between the city and the countryside. Li Haijiong described a “cultural revolution” in the world of Chinese education, which was “quickly educating a red, proletarian intelligentsia,” and suggested the Soviets offer material to further such a development.

Other Chinese letter-writers expressed their interest in heroic and utopian Soviet activities, such as the experiences of settlers in the Virgin Lands. Gorkii was worth reading, argued Zhang Yuquan from Beijing Pedagogical Institute, because he persuasively linked “education with labor.”

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30 July 1959, “Materialy chitatel’skoi konferentsii v Tianjin,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 84, l. 19.
33 July 1959, “Materialy chitatel’skoi konferentsii v Tianjin,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 84, l. 24.
34 23 May—29 May 1960, “Svodka pisem,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 148, l. 76-78.
Interestingly, the USSR’s efforts to “catch up and surpass” the advanced West was at the forefront of Chinese perceptions of the general Soviet program and purpose. Chinese writers made grandiose claims about the journal as a “bridge” between Soviet and Chinese society, and as an illustration of the “glorious victories of the USSR” in every imaginable area. “The Soviet Union in several important areas of science and technology” wrote He Bizhang in Fuxian Ribao, “has already by far overtaken the leading capitalist countries.”

A contributor to Zhongguo gongren directed readers to Suzhong youhao precisely because it provided evidence from Soviet economists about matching the United States in iron production by 1968, and steel the following year. Chinese letter-writers and those queried in the Readers’ Conferences routinely requested more material in the journal about the heroic efforts to construct Soviet socialism in the past, as well as the future achievements that would catapult the socialist world past the world of the advanced West. Song Ji told Rogov in October 1958 that Chinese readers wanted to learn more about the “work and struggles of the Soviet people—for example, about the acquired strengths of the Soviet people that will enable them to surpass the USA in the course of seven years.”

The most significant recasting of the Soviet model thus concerned the United States. Yao Zhen, a journalist and a Central Committee official in international propaganda, bluntly told Rogov and his colleagues: “If you want to have more subscribers, regularly print in each number material about how the USSR is overtaking the USA. In China right now everyone is interested in one question: how the PRC is overtaking England and how the USSR is overtaking the USA.” Avoid generalities and vagueness, he continued, and stick to the “concrete: facts and figures.”

Xiong Fu, an official from the Committee for Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries, hoped to see all discussions of Soviet achievements in comparative context, and of course the

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40 24 October 1958, “Beseda,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 11, l. 17.
41 31 October 1958, “Beseda,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 11, l. 45.

comparison that mattered concerned the United States. Tell us “concretely in what areas the USSR will surpass America,” he demanded of the editorial board at a Readers’ Conference. Lu Xiangxiang also suggested that “Chinese workers” wanted specific information about Soviet measures to overtake America.\(^{41}\) The Chinese also pushed the Soviets to be precise and make good on their vague claims about the glorious transition to communism. The journal needs to provide, argued Cheng Guangrui of Renmin ribao, “concrete examples of how the USSR will exceed in per capita production the United States.”\(^{42}\) Deng Tuo, the editor-in-chief of Renmin ribao who took his own life as the Cultural Revolution unfolded in 1966, similarly advised: “In the area of economic information it would be best to make comparisons with the capitalist countries. In such a way the material will be the most pertinent, and will inspire enthusiasm and strengthen the faith of the reader that we will overtake the capitalist countries.”\(^{43}\) With different interests but along the same lines, Wen Zijie, a young man from Shanghai, wanted to know how the Soviet volleyball team fared against the Americans on their recent trip there.\(^{44}\)

Chinese interest in the moral and ethical dimensions of daily life and the struggles involved in constructing a new utopian society illustrated some of the basic dilemmas of the Sino-Soviet relationship. In early 1958, Yang Hansheng, of the Ministry of Culture as well as the Committee for Cultural Ties with Foreign Countries, focused on personal matters: “We are very interested in the family life of Soviet people, such as the relations between spouses, parents and children, and so on.”\(^{45}\) What were the Chinese looking for as an alternative to a distant Soviet Union that seemed too “abstract and imprecise,” as Shen Zheng of the PLA suggested?\(^{46}\) We have a “great interest in the daily life of

\(^{41}\) March-April 1958, “Materialy chitatel’skikh konferentsii,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 13, l. 20, 38.
\(^{42}\) 28 October 1958, “Kratkaia zapis’ o konferentsii chitatele,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1 d. 14, l. 15; also 25-30 January 1958, “Svodka pisem chitatele zhurnala ‘Sovetsko-kitaiskaiia druzhba’,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 16, l. 11.
\(^{44}\) 7-13 March 1960, “Svodka pisem chitatele,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 148, l. 146.
\(^{46}\) 28 October 1958, “Kratkaia zapis’ o konferentsii chitatele,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 14, l. 6.
Soviet people, in their habits and customs,” emphasized Qi Ke, a poet and editor of the newspaper Yangze. In the fall of 1958, Rogov and his colleagues solicited contributions from a collection of literary and newspaper figures. Li Erzhuang, a writer, Friendship Society administrator, and Wuhan City Party Secretary, responded to the Soviets for more information about poems, songs, and pictures of Soviet daily life: “material about the way of life of Soviet people.”\(^47\) At a similar discussion in Shanghai, Xingwan editor Liu Shimo looked for basic human moments of camaraderie and care: he appreciated a story about Soviet doctors taking a personal interest in Chinese patients in Heilongjiang.\(^48\) Yu Changfu from Harbin offered his own story about personal help from a Soviet border guard after he broke his leg near the Sino-Soviet border.\(^49\)

However, the world of daily life and personal relationships was a contradictory problem for the Soviets. How could this enormous governmental relationship, signed into law by the agreement between Mao and Stalin in 1950, address and cultivate these moments of cultural exchange from daily life? How could the vast “Friendship,” which after all meant a series of socialist bloc exchanges in industrial and economic development, address the personal matters of affection and sociability suggested by the term itself? And what could the Soviet Union in the wake of Stalinist dictatorship and the tragic degradation of public life possibly offer to anyone in this area? Indeed, the surliness of Russian public life had been a well-known constant throughout the entire twentieth-century. Ironically, it was precisely the “empathetic” character of American consumerism, as Victoria De Grazia puts it, that specifically addressed these matters.\(^50\) The Soviet notion of “friendship” meant a series of demands that included exclusive loyalty to Moscow. Suzhong youhao contributors attempted to address this issue with articles on topics such as the positive experiences of Chinese students in the Soviet Union, the affectionate family life of a typical Russian worker, the fine relationships cultivated by a


\(^{48}\) 1958, “Beseda o zhurnale,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 11, l. 36.


Soviet music teacher in China, and various other connections between Russians and Chinese as examples of “friendship.”

The expectations and needs of socialist bloc allies such as the Chinese pushed the Soviets to recast their own history and experience in a way they knew would conform better to current Chinese concerns, however divorced this was from Soviet reality and history. In June 1958, in an internal discussion, V.D. Kudriavtsev enthusiastically welcomed Mao’s speech about the arrival of the “east wind” in international politics. He addressed Chinese efforts to overtake England in steel and iron production, and professed that Soviets were “genuinely happy about the successes of the workers of China in the industrial area.”

Zakharov recognized the Chinese desire to see Soviet readers more respectful and interested in Chinese conditions and contributions, and suggested stories about traditions and practices foreign to Soviet readers, such as the big character posters (dazibao) then common in China, the glorification of physical labor, and the experience of agricultural labor in the countryside for urban cadres and intellectuals. Radical trends characteristic of the interests of Chairman Mao were depicted by the Soviets as familiar and part of their experience. The Soviets wrote that current Chinese artists who painted pictures of peasants were behaving as good socialist realists, painting the “life of the village.”

Soviet history, it seems, needed to be more effectively recast in current Chinese terms. As a means to connect with Chinese readers, Rogov suggested the journal return to the earlier stages of the construction of socialism in the Soviet Union, and describe the difficulties and dramatic struggles of the 1929-33 era. The Soviet Union as well had its youthful experience with revolutionary change, cultural revolution, and utopian idealism. The Soviets

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52 20 June 1958, “Doklad,” V.D. Kudriavtsev, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 12, l. 30-34.

53 6 June 1958, “Vypiska iz pis’mo,” Zakharov, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 10, l. 3.

54 10 July 1958, “Konferentsiia chitatelei zhurnala ‘Druzhba,’” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 12, l. 3-17.

seemed to understand that the Chinese were interested in labor history, historic Russian efforts to construct socialism, and communist education methods. Nevertheless, the Soviet publications still focused on theater, art, music, and film, complained longtime embassy official N.G. Sudarikov.56 He pushed for more attention to the “advantages of the Soviet system,” the “economic strength of the USSR,” Soviet accomplishments in industry and agriculture, Soviet aid to the countries of the bloc, and Soviet support for developing countries. Provide “portraits of simple Soviet people, who labor without losing their strength,” advised another board member.57 Soviet officials in foreign affairs, culture, and propaganda worked together with Chinese colleagues in Moscow and China to craft these stories and a general vision that is evident in the pages of Suzhong youhao. Soviets themselves thus contributed to the “sinicization” of the journal, optimistically assuming Russians and Chinese indeed shared much in common in 1958–60.58

The language of the journal came from Chinese political history and culture, even when describing events in the USSR. The collaborative nature of the production of the journal and the need to address the assumptions of the Chinese audience encouraged even the use of slogans and terms taken from contemporary Chinese politics. As a result of the “good path” (meihao de daolu) articulated in the new Seven Year Plan, the Soviet Union was daily “striding toward communism” (xiang gongzhanzhuyi maijin).59 Soviet industrial development was marked by its “speed” and rapid development.60 Khrushchev’s competitive notion of peaceful coexistence and “catch up and surpass” was a “campaign” and “movement.” “This movement has the support of the party and the entire people,” offered the editors in early 1959.61 Russian slogans and notions were inevitably sinicized in the process of presentation and translation. “The party’s plan is the Soviet people’s plan,” (Dang de jihua

56 26 January 1959, N. Sudarikov to G.A. Zhukov, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 81, l. 4.
59 “Wo you qinian jihua,” Suzhong youhao, no. 7 (1959), 5-6, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 87, l. 5.
60 “Zuotian, jintian, mingtian,” Suzhong youhao, no. 2 (1959), 15, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 87, l. 15.
61 “Sulian chushengye chanpin shengchan yiding chaoguo meiguo,” Suzhong youhao, no. 3 (1959), 5, GARF f. 9324, op. 1 d. 87, l. 5.

shi sulian renmin de jihua), wrote Karasev (Kalaxiefu).  

Or sometimes the language about the Soviet experience was entirely drawn from China. “The Soviet people’s path is glorious” (Sulian renmin de daolu shi guangrong de), concluded Karasev. “Communism definitely will be constructed!”

In other areas, however, the journal made no concession to Chinese concerns. The purpose of the journal was to educate the Chinese about the stages of socialism, the nature of the development of the bloc, and of course the importance of Soviet leadership of the bloc. Soviets with experience in China saw the party program unveiled at the Twenty-First Party Congress as useful in Sino-Soviet relations, for these were the official events where the nature of the transition from socialism to communism and its meaning were clarified. “Let’s publicize in full the party program,” argued editorial board member Kakashvili to his colleagues. Sudarikov similarly picked up on this issue, and suggested information on “problems relating to the transition from socialism to communism in the USSR.” The Soviet embassy in Beijing in 1958 regularly brought attention to this issue of the stages of socialist development, and the “theoretical” matter of the “gradual transition from socialism to communism.” Soviet plans and recent events, suggested Soviet expert Karasev, illustrated that “we are decisively moving toward the next stage of advanced communism.” The journal was designed to re-educate Chinese who thought otherwise, or who thought the Chinese might get there first.

Soviet observers who were aware and also fearful of the direction of Chinese politics advised caution in this complicated effort to address simultaneously two very different (even if only internal, in the Soviet case) reading audiences. At the height of the Great Leap Forward in June 1959, B. Gurevich and Iu.Lysenko argued for the necessity of “tact” in the presentation

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64 9 September 1958, “Protokol,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 6, l. 1.
65 26 January 1959, N. Sudarikov to G.A. Zhukov, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 81, l. 6.
66 1958, “Vypiska iz otcheta posol’stva SSSR v KNR za 1958 g.,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 81, l. 11.
of sensitive political matters. For Chinese readers, they suggested the journal refrain from discussing the prevalence of “material incentives” in Soviet industry.\textsuperscript{68} They were aware of the pointed concerns from many radical Chinese readers about the apparently suspect “class structure” still in existence in the Soviet Union. “Are there in your cities and countryside classes, like landlords, kulaks, and capitalists,” asked Zao Dengwan of the PLA?\textsuperscript{69} Thinking of their Soviet audience, Gurevich and Lysenko reminded their colleagues of necessary limits to the enthusiasm for developments in China. Soviet readers would perhaps be confused by too much knowledge about what was really happening in China. Gurevich and Lysenko suggested the journal shy away from articles on the people’s communes in China, “even though the organization of the communes throughout the country on a massive scale had already been completed.”\textsuperscript{70} Certain basic trends and practices in both societies were best left unexplored at present.

An acceptable topic for everyone, however, was more information on how the Chinese were going “to catch up and surpass England” in the next fifteen years.\textsuperscript{71} The Chinese thus played a fascinating role in pushing the Soviets to take seriously their own claims about the making of a communist society. Publish the speech from Lenin at the Third Komsomol Congress, suggested an editorial board member in October 1958, because here Lenin claims that “communism will soon be built.”\textsuperscript{72} “Show in the journal the country in 1965,” pushed a Chinese contributor queried at a November 1958 session; a picture of a factory, a collective farm, industrial productivity, a television station and so on as they will be in this future.\textsuperscript{73} An article appeared the following year on precisely this topic.\textsuperscript{74} Chinese contributors to the journal could offer personal testimonies about the seriousness of the Soviet commitment to tackle the

\textsuperscript{68} June 1959, “Spravka,” B. Gurevich and Iu. Lysenko, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 145, l. 18-20.
\textsuperscript{69} 4-9 May 1959, “Svodka pisem,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 85, l. 198.
\textsuperscript{70} June 1959, “Spravka,” B. Gurevich and Iu. Lysenko, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 145, l. 18-20.
\textsuperscript{71} June 1959, “Spravka,” B. Gurevich and Iu. Lysenko, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 145, l. 18-20; see also 24 October 1958, “Zasedanie redkollegii,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 6, l. 15.
\textsuperscript{72} 24 October 1958, “Zasedanie redkollegii,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 6, l. 13.
\textsuperscript{73} 13 November 1958, “Protokol zasedania,” GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 6, l. 27.
\textsuperscript{74} “1965 niande sulian jichuang zhizaoye,” Suzhong youhao, 3 (1959), 28, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 149, l. 28.
“construction of communism as a great objective and task.” Vague claims about the distant future are perhaps the easiest to make, but what was helpful in one context did not necessarily work in another. Closer to the West and more informed about its prosperity, Czechs and Slovaks found Khrushchev ineffective because he was ultimately “unrealistic” in his numerous plans and grandiose claims, especially regarding this matter of catching up with the West.

The Soviets continued to have difficulty absorbing Chinese concerns and complaints, even as Rogov and his colleagues tried to listen. The continuing Chinese complaint about the absence of a “mutual” exchange baffled Soviets who took their pedagogic mission for granted. Still in May 1960 Li Zhuang continued to remind N.G. Sudarikov that “in the Soviet Union there is less printed and discussed about China in the newspapers and journals than about the Soviet Union in China.” Why were the Russians not more interested in the Chinese and their culture? The journal sought out stories and experiences that illustrated Russian learning from the Chinese, and published articles about Russians students engaged in Chinese language lessons, Russian enthusiasts of Chinese traditional medicine, the study of Chinese literature in the Soviet Union, and the positive experiences of Chinese workers, specialists, and graduate students in the Soviet Union. The founding of the Soviet-Chinese Friendship Society in the Soviet Union in 1957, as previously noted, was conceived with this problem in mind as well.

Even the progress of Central Asia under Soviet rule, a matter of pride for the Soviets and visualized by them as directly pertinent to the experience of

76 Václav Kotyk, “Výkum vztahů mezi socialistickými státy v ústavu pro mezinárodní politiku a ekonomii,” in Petr Druulák and Petr Kratochvíl, ed., et al., 50 let českého výzkumu mezinárodních vztahů; od ÚMPE k ÚMV (Prague: Ústav mezinárodných vztahů, 2007), 40.
77 25 May 1960, “Iz zapisi besedy,” N.G. Sudarikov, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, d. 146, l. 4.
China, was interpreted differently by the Chinese. Suzhong youhao often visualized 1965 in places like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, when Central Asia was to be a central contributor to the socialist bloc community in machine tool production, precious metals, the chemicals industry and other areas. Steel factories in Kazakhstan were “better and then some than America’s best factories.” Over the course of 1959-1965, Kazakhstan planned to build some thirty new electric power stations, again bringing the region “near to the American level” in the quantity of electric power produced per person. The Kazakhs routinely sent their ballet and other cultural groups to Moscow, much to the appreciation of sophisticated audiences in the capital. This vision, however, was not necessarily an appealing one to the Chinese, who did not imagine themselves as beneficiaries of Russia’s traditional civilizing mission in Asia.

The discussions surrounding the production of Suzhong youhao illustrate the complicated dialogue and diverse interests that influenced the making of the Soviet notion of “catch up and surpass.” In many ways, communication and collaboration between the Russians and Chinese was difficult. Both sides misunderstood the other, but tried to recast the very different foreign society as something familiar and comprehensible. Soviets aware of the radical trends shaping Chinese politics in 1958-60 focused not on the challenges they posed for the bloc but on their likely contribution to the shared effort to “catch up” and even “surpass” America. This greater goal was still shared by the two sides, and proved to be a more acceptable topic for conversation than the contrasting practices in industry and culture that divided the two countries. The Chinese imagined the Soviet Seven-Year Plan and Twenty-First Party Congress to be similar to mobilization “campaigns” from Chinese political history. As the socialist societies sparred with each other about competition with America, they overlooked the fact that competing with America was an impossible proposition for anyone in 1959, and a dangerous dilemma for

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80 “1965 niande hasakesidan,” Suzhong youhao, no. 3 (1959), 30, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 149, l. 30; also Kalaxiefu, “Gongchanzhuyi yiding neng jiancheng,” Suzhong youhao, no. 4 (1959), 4, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 149, l. 4.
81 “Hasake baleiwu zai mosike,” Suzhong youhao, no. 3 (1959), 24-25, GARF f. 9324, op. 1, 1960, d. 149, l. 24-25.
ruling communist parties who now based their rule upon these unending public discussions and pronouncements about the nature and timing of a future “communist” society.

The fate of Suzhong youhao serves as another example of the diverse needs and expectations shaping socialist bloc collaboration and Sino-Soviet relations that both parties found impossible to accommodate. Chinese contributors to the many Readers’ Conferences expressed their desire to become closer to Soviet society, engage in deeper forms of communication, and to learn more about its people and everyday life. The paternalist Soviet vision of “cultured” communism, however, was only capable of perpetually offering the safe and pedagogic models of proper personal and social behavior for emulation drawn from Soviet experience and history. Khrushchev himself complained to Peng Zhen, while the two of them were in Romania on June 26, 1960, that the Chinese were inserting material into the journal that the Soviet Union did not want to see in print in either country. The journal was shut down in September 1960. Chinese interpreters and journalists such as Wang Yiyi departed Moscow on September 12, 1960, still hopeful that the journal, a “small link in our great and eternal friendship,” would someday make a comeback. Most of the socialist bloc advisers and exchange participants had left China that summer, however, and the journal, like the “Great Friendship” generally, would never be revived.
